

# IMPROVING URBAN FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICAN CITIES: CRITICALLY ASSESSING THE ROLE OF INFORMAL TRADERS

Battersby, Jane; Watson, Vanessa;  
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# INTEGRATING FOOD INTO URBAN PLANNING

EDITED BY  
YVES CABANNES &  
CECILIA MAROCCHINO

 **UCLPRESS**



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# Integrating Food into Urban Planning



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Edited by Yves Cabannes and  
Cecilia Marocchino

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## Foreword

Food systems will play a central role in delivering the sustainable development agenda.

With the majority of people already living in urban areas – not only in large metropolitan areas, but also in secondary cities and small towns – a greater focus on urban planning as a way of influencing food systems development will be critically important.

Until recently, urban planners have paid little attention to food systems, emphasising ‘traditional’ urban priorities such as public transportation and decent housing. However, since the beginning of the current millennium, major national associations of urban planners have started to notice this scarce attention to food, which, ironically, was the magnet for creative city planning just a couple of centuries ago. National governments across the globe have now acknowledged, through the New Urban Agenda, the importance of local governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda, with food and good nutrition being a core element. Local governments, often with limited resources, have started to promote food system planning as an important entry point to ensuring improved well-being through availability of and access to proper nutrition for all city dwellers.

In 2018, we can safely say that significant momentum has gathered for a book that addresses, for the first time, how food systems thinking can be best incorporated into the planning of urban areas.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has increasingly become a catalyst in multilateral governance mechanisms on urban sustainability and in helping sub-national governments to foster resilient and sustainable food systems. However, the growing demand for this assistance warrants more effective attention to what good food systems planning means. This requires a careful study of successful examples of urban and food systems design and planning, under different social, economic and environmental backgrounds. This is both to generate a clear understanding of the local situation and to provide a

sound basis for food system planning that pulls together urban planning and food system expertise. This book aims to provide a guide for the food system planner by bridging these two fields.

The book is the result of an extensive search to identify the best examples from across the world. A call for abstracts produced more than 200 submissions, which were carefully analysed by our editors. This publication presents examples from both developed and developing countries, with the objective of sharing essential knowledge about urban food planning which can be applied in different contexts and will withstand the test of time. The selected cases highlight that, although each urban and territorial scenario is unique when it comes to urban food planning, many of the challenges and potential solutions share similarities.

In its role as a knowledge broker, FAO relies on partnerships and alliances to deliver the best possible guidance on emerging global issues. For this reason, FAO teamed up with the Development Planning Unit of UCL and UCL Press, to publish these case studies on the innovations in food systems planning and on how to implement sustainable urban food planning.

Improved access to and utilisation of food is essential to current and future generations. With cities at the centre of our civilisation, it will become increasingly critical for food to be centrally reflected in the planning of urban areas. It is hoped that this publication will motivate city officials and their technical teams, urban planners and related professionals to view food as central to a truly systemic approach, and to contribute to the understanding of the different factors involved in the inclusion of food in all urban planning efforts.

Kostas Stamoulis  
Assistant Director-General  
Economic and Social Development Department, FAO

Anna Lartey  
Director  
Nutrition and Food Systems Division, FAO

Jamie Morrison  
Strategic Programme Leader  
Food Systems Programme, FAO



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### 5.5.7. The importance of seeing the city with 'urban agriculture lenses': the inclusion of multiple viewpoints in municipal planning processes

The experience from 2012 to 2014 teaches us that it is possible to see the city through the eyes of urban agriculture. Despite the uncertainty in the institutional future of urban agriculture, the urban farmers organised around their farms will continue to grow crops, motivated by the same desires as always: to improve their diet, income and the urban socio-environmental surroundings in which they live. Their daily labours, nearly invisible to the eyes of the current authorities, continue there, where they have always been, anchored in history and in a dispersed social web throughout the city. Empowering the social interactions of urban farmers, encouraging their social organisation around communities of practice united by common interest, is a task to be carried on by those of us who believe that Lima can be a more just, caring and sustainable city. Urban agriculture has much to contribute, both to people and to the social and environmental systems of the city. The advances (and even the setbacks) identified during these years show us that another city is possible. A new social movement, which sees the city with eyes of solidarity and sustainability, is lying dormant just under the surface, and it is our job to awaken it.

## Note

1. Developing Sustainable Food Systems for Urban Areas: Piloting a Holistic Approach in Nairobi (Kenya), Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Lima (Peru).

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## **Improving urban food security in African cities**

### **Critically assessing the role of informal retailers**

Jane Battersby and Vanessa Watson

There is a growing realisation that the issue of food security, for a long time a primarily rural concern, needs to become a focus of urban policy and planning. It is usually assumed that solutions to urban food insecurity lie in support for food production (urban agriculture), but research has shown that most African urbanites, including low-income households, source their food from retail outlets. It is therefore essential to consider the urban food marketing and distribution structure and how this impacts on food security and urban poverty.

This chapter will first review the evidence from recent research in African cities which supports the argument that urban agriculture is not as important a source of food for the poor as it is often believed to be. [Section 9.1](#) describes the transitioning food retail environment in which supermarkets are increasingly present and informal food retailers face removal or formalisation. This informal food retail sector is argued to be a major source of food supply for the poor. The following section uses the case study of Cape Town to show how the shifting pattern of food outlets has impacted on one particular city. The last section will argue that urban planning has often been used as a mechanism for these kinds of shifts in the nature of food retail outlets and has, perhaps unwittingly, become an important cause of increases in urban food insecurity, but that it is possible to consider a role that planning can play to shape the urban food distribution pattern in ways that instead promote urban food security.

The chapter draws on extensive research on urban food security in Southern African cities carried out under the auspices of the African Food

Security Urban Network (AFSUN) project at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, as well as further empirical research on South African cities and especially Cape Town by Jane Battersby.

## 9.1. How do poor urbanites source their food? Evidence from African cities

Although there has been a growing interest among policy-makers and planners in the role of urban agriculture in addressing urban food insecurity, improving nutrition and increasing dietary diversity, the evidence base to support the assumption of its central role is weak (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010). Warren and colleagues (2015) argue that this is because of poor-quality study designs rather than because the link has been disproved. These authors find no reason to discourage the practice of urban agriculture but suggest that its potential to address food insecurity should be more thoroughly tested before it is adopted and resourced as the primary policy tool to address urban food insecurity. Research specifically in the African context found that the prevalence of urban agriculture varies greatly between cities owing to distinctive local histories and geographies and was unable to generalise about the potential of urban agriculture to address food insecurity (Frayne et al. 2014).

Despite the overwhelming policy and planning focus on urban agriculture, the vast majority of African urban residents obtain most of their food from various types of retail outlets (Maxwell 1998; Crush and Frayne 2011b). The structure of this market is changing rapidly as supermarkets expand into urban Africa and diffuse their products from wealthy to food-insecure households (Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003). Research in Southern African countries has shown particularly rapid supermarket growth driven in part by large South-African-based food retail chains that have invested heavily in larger and secondary cities (Crush and Frayne 2011b). By way of example, Acquah and colleagues (2014) show how Southern Africa's 'supermarket revolution' has transformed the way in which urban (and rural) residents of Botswana source their food. Supermarkets now handle around 50–60 per cent of food retail in cities and major urban villages in Botswana. The AFSUN survey of residents of a low-income area in Gaborone found that 92 per cent of households reported using supermarkets as a source of food. Only four per cent of households never shopped at supermarkets.

However, the expansion of supermarkets does not imply a declining importance of informal food retailers in supporting urban food security (Battersby and Watson 2018), as research in Lusaka (Zambia) has shown (Abrahams 2010). In this city informal food networks and outlets still play a very important role and integrate in various ways with the formal food sector. Lusaka is unusual in some respects, however, in terms of the role played by the municipality in supporting the informal food sector (see below). Although Lusaka may have unique characteristics, Reardon and colleagues (2007) have identified a process of ‘consumer segment differentiation’ whereby consumers buy different types of products at different types of market.

In most cities in Southern Africa the growth of supermarkets has had an impact on informal food suppliers, and evidence from Botswana (Acquah et al. 2014) suggests that the size and growth of the informal economy have been constrained by supermarket growth. However, informal food retailers (whether pavement trade or in markets) have advantages in serving low-income households, since they can gain better physical access to them, have lower overheads, can break bulk and sell in small units and sometimes offer credit (Battersby 2012). The larger formal supermarkets tend to locate closer to middle-class areas and are often only accessible by car, but are frequently able to sell cheaper than informal traders, since they can access in bulk and have control over supply chains. Formal and informal retailers also link in a variety of ways (informal sellers sometimes using larger formal outlets as wholesalers) and consequently the way the systems pattern spatially in any city, as well as the extent to which informal traders are being undermined by supermarkets, depends very much on context (Crush and Frayne 2011a). It is for this reason that the concept of the ‘food desert’, often used in Global North literature to describe urban districts where food is difficult to access, was found to have less relevance in the AFSUN research sites: small and informal food traders are highly flexible and mobile and are able to occupy the spaces that have no supermarkets (Battersby and Crush 2014).

As patterns of urban food retail transform in Africa it is important to consider what changes are happening in the resultant food system. Research in Cape Town found that the largest four supermarket companies (which account for 97 per cent of sales in the formal food retail sector) estimated that, although 56 per cent of their vegetables came from within 200 km of the city, just five per cent of grain did, and, even though there is considerable meat and poultry production in the region, only a third of protein came from local areas (Battersby et al. 2014, 159).



Similarly, informal traders cannot be assumed to be sourcing locally. A survey of 100 informal traders in Cape Town found that they bought food for trade from sources that have local, national and international supply chains. Over half of traders bought from wholesalers (largely for processed foods and meat), who source processed foods from national and international producers. The main source of fresh produce was the Cape Town Fresh Produce Market, which procures locally where possible, but also sells key products that cannot be produced locally (such as bananas). Some traders also buy direct from farms, but this is not often possible given existing contracting agreements between farmers and retailers (Battersby et al. 2014, 163).

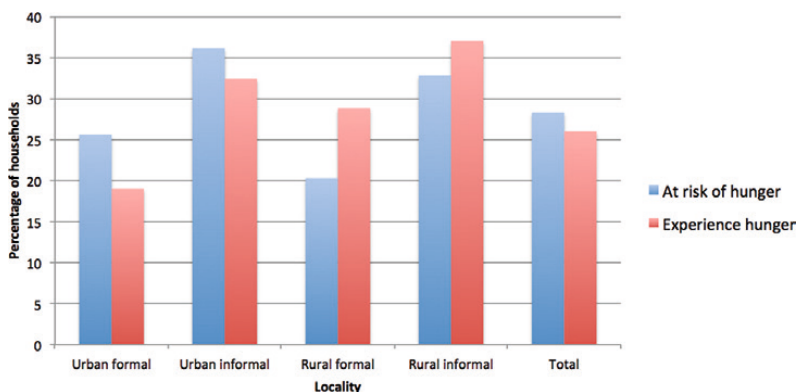
Similar experiences of non-local food supply chains are to be found throughout Africa. In Maputo, Mozambique, the frozen chickens sold by street traders are Brazilian (Raimundo et al. 2014, 27). In Kitwe, Zambia, fish sold by traders come from local sources and also from Namibia and China (Siyanga 2016). In Kisumu, Kenya, eggs being sold by wholesale traders in Kibuye market were from Uganda (Hayombe et al. 2018). Throughout West Africa, imports now supply more than 40 per cent of the demand for cereals (Moseley et al. 2010, 5774). It is therefore essential that food security policies consider the governance of formal and informal, and local and global components of, urban food systems.

Given the importance of context in shaping the distribution of food outlets and the links between this and urban food security, the next section focuses on a case study of Cape Town, South Africa.

## **9.2. The changing structure of urban food distribution networks and urban food security – Cape Town**

The value of Cape Town as a case study to illustrate how the food system affects urban food insecurity is that this city, and South Africa, is quite wealthy compared with the rest of the subcontinent and yet levels of urban food insecurity are high. Cape Town has also experienced extensive supermarket penetration into the poorer parts of the city, which has impacted in turn on informal food retailers.

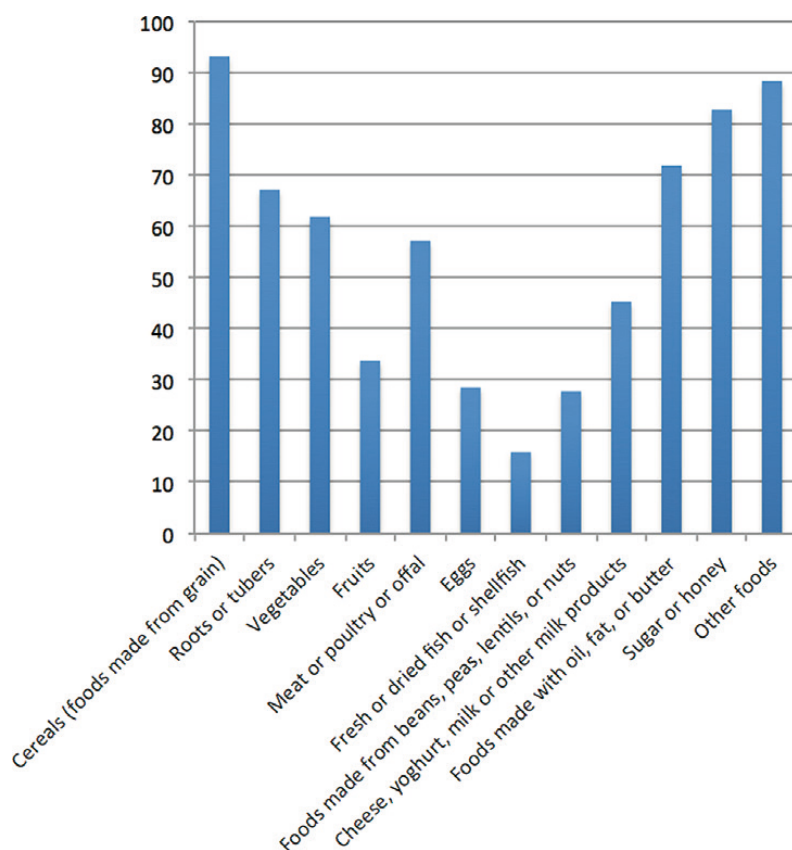
South Africa is food secure at a national scale, meaning that it currently either produces or can import sufficient food to meet the food needs of its residents. However, the 2013 South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES) found that 28 per cent



**Figure 9.1** Proportion of the South African population experiencing food insecurity by location. (Source: Redrawn from Shisana et al. (2013))

of households nationally are at risk of hunger and a further 26 per cent experience hunger. In urban informal areas the proportion of households at risk of hunger was 36 per cent and correspondingly 32 per cent experienced hunger (Shisana et al. 2013, 10). Figure 9.1 indicates the spread of food insecurity across urban and rural areas and between formal and informal areas. In Cape Town a 2008 survey, conducted by AFSUN, of households in three selected poor areas (Khayelitsha, Philippi and Ocean View) found that 80 per cent of households in the sample were food insecure, 68 per cent of these falling into the category of severely food insecure (Battersby 2012).

Urban households in the AFSUN survey of low-income areas of Cape Town exhibited limited dietary diversity with an over-reliance on starchy staples and foods with high caloric density (Battersby 2012). Figure 9.2 shows the foodgroups consumed in surveyed low-income areas. This diet, high in bulky, high-energy foods, but deficient in protein and micronutrients is typical of food-insecure households (Savy et al. 2005). Household members may consume enough food to meet the calorimetric food requirements, but the type of food they consume may not have the requisite nutrients to sustain good physical and mental health and development. Urbanisation is associated with acceleration of the nutrition transition. While earlier work on the nutrition transition identified changes in consumption as driven in part by increased disposable income in urban areas of developing countries (Popkin 1999), more recent work has highlighted the fact that it is lower-income households that are most exposed to foods that are high in energy but nutritionally compromised (Wiggins and Keats



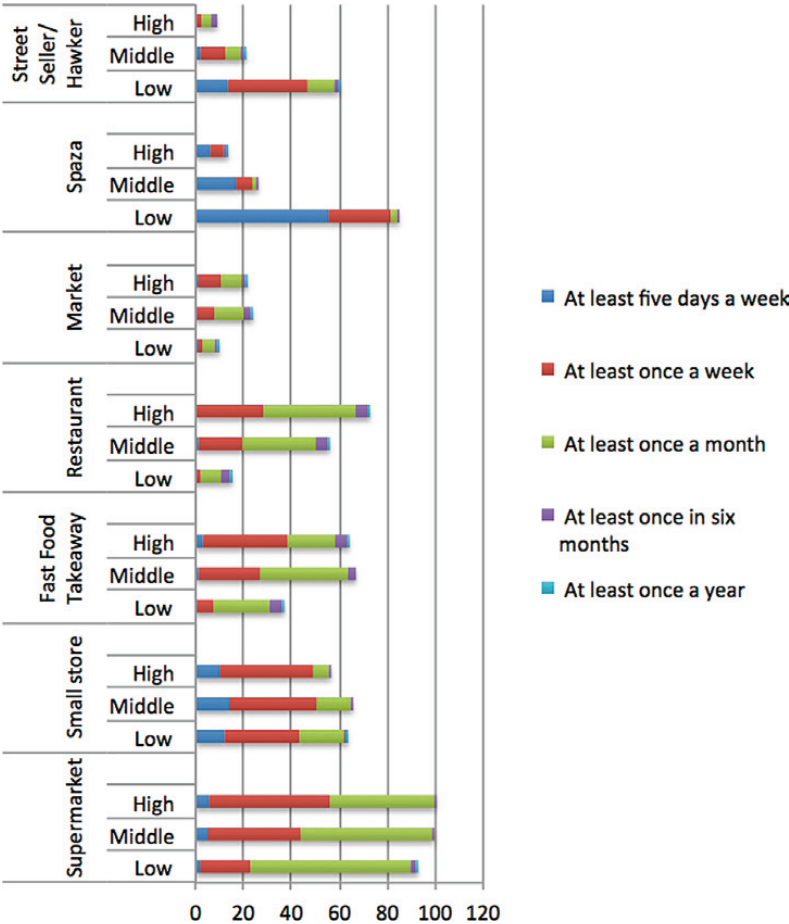
**Figure 9.2** Household dietary diversity in surveyed low-income areas of Cape Town (percentage of households that had consumed particular foodstuffs within the preceding 24 hours). (Source: Redrawn from Battersby (2011))

2015). Because of diets of this kind, malnutrition persists but at the same time people may be overweight, and obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, are on the increase. Dietary quality is therefore an important health issue, particularly in countries such as South Africa which are urbanising rapidly, and it is essential to understand the role of the food system in shaping diets. The food retail mix is an essential component of such analysis.

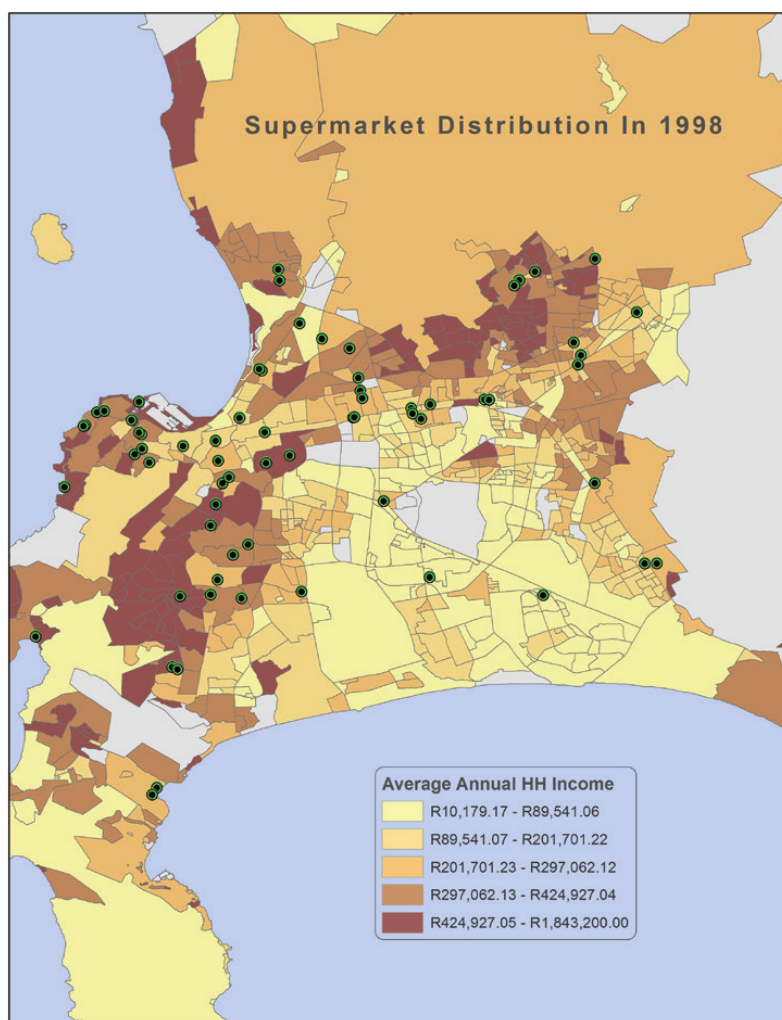
Food insecurity in urban areas is typically characterised as a problem of food access among poor households, usually understood as having insufficient income to buy the required food. However, income is not the only factor determining food access and geographical proximity to sources

or outlets providing nutritious and diverse foods is very important. Other factors such as access to storage and refrigeration, household structure and size, and income stability all influence food access and choice.

As elsewhere, research in Cape Town reveals a low level of reliance on urban agriculture. In the 2013 AFSUN survey of selected low-income areas, only two per cent of households sourced food through their own production, compared with seven per cent of households in middle-income areas and 10 per cent of households in high-income areas. Larger parcels of land and resources (including time) appeared to be necessary to stimulate self-production. Furthermore, although urban agriculture is



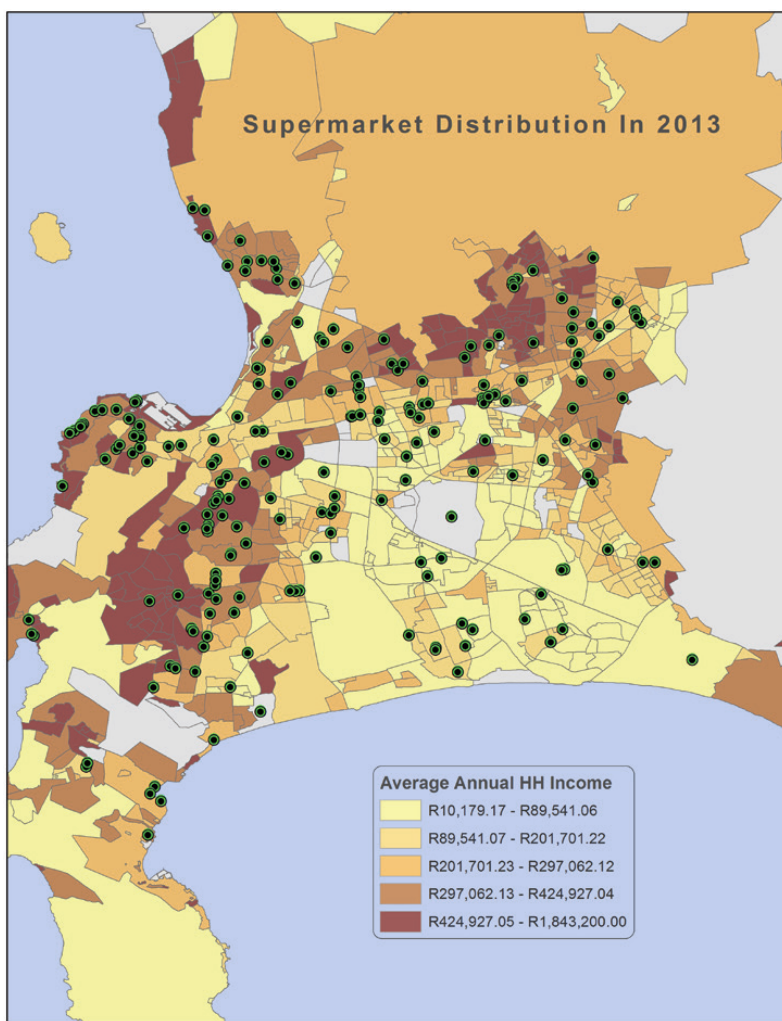
**Figure 9.3** Frequency of sourcing food from different market types in high-, middle- and low-income areas of Cape Town, 2013. (Source: AFSUN unpublished)



**Figure 9.4** Location of supermarkets in Cape Town, 1998 and 2013.  
(Source: Redrawn from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/alex/benv/2017/00000043/00000003/art00009>)

also often viewed as a poverty relief strategy, the study found that household-based urban agriculture is not a significant income earner (South African Cities Network [SACN] 2015).

In the AFSUN-surveyed low-income areas of Cape Town, households obtained their food from a range of sources: borrowing from neighbours; sharing with other households; community food kitchens and food aid; self-production; buying from informal traders, small shops, restaurants or



**Figure 9.4** (Continued)

takeaways; and buying from supermarkets (Battersby 2011). Figure 9.3 shows the food sources for high-, middle- and low-income areas. In the three low-income surveyed areas the most commonly used source of food was the supermarket, for both food-secure and food-insecure households. This was followed by smaller shops and takeaways, and informal traders. However, supermarkets were infrequently visited, day-to-day purchases being made from the informal sector.

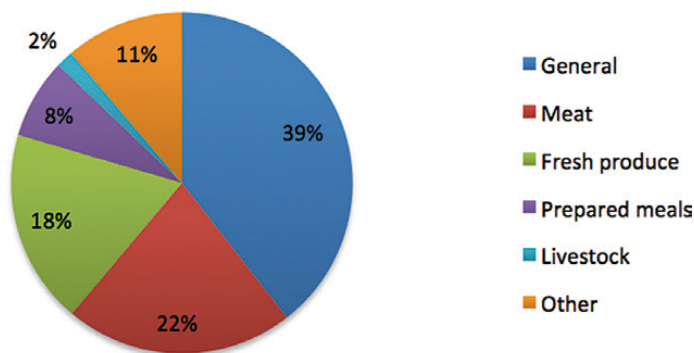
This pattern of food acquisition has shifted significantly over the last several decades with the rapid penetration of supermarkets into the

poorer areas of Cape Town (see [Figure 9.4](#) showing supermarket distribution in 1998 and 2013). Previously, these areas were served largely by informal traders and a few smaller shops. The post-apartheid era has been characterised by market deregulation and an impetus towards local economic development in townships. This has provided the preconditions for supermarket expansion into low-income areas. Improved infrastructure in many townships has made the presence of large retail businesses feasible (Tustin and Strydom 2006, 56) and the growing disposable income among African consumers has made the township market appealing to supermarkets (van Wyk 2004). The arrival of the supermarkets has made it easier for the urban poor to purchase bulk goods at lower prices. However, it has also increased access to highly processed foods, without necessarily increasing access to fresh produce (Battersby and Peyton 2014).

Despite the increased presence of supermarkets, both food secure and insecure households still rely heavily on the purchase of food from informal traders, since these traders offer some advantages to consumers. So, although supermarkets offer lower prices per unit, high safety standards and a larger range of goods, they are often poorly located for consumers without access to transport, have opening hours unsuited to consumers with long commutes and do not sell products in unit sizes affordable on a day-to-day basis. By contrast, informal traders will sell in unit sizes fitting customer needs, are well located for daily purchases, have long opening hours, sell cuts of meat preferred by customers and may offer food on credit in recognition of the economic realities of their customers. Though they may be more expensive than supermarkets,<sup>1</sup> offer more limited ranges of foods and have lower safety standards, there are clear food security advantages with informal traders, who by necessity are more responsive to customer needs than are supermarkets. Their range of products is also more closely linked to customer needs, as shown in [Figure 9.5](#), which indicates the product types of informal food traders in two Cape Town low-income areas.

Although a diverse food retail sector, including supermarkets and informal traders, provides clear benefits to consumers, it is not clear whether this retail mix is viable given current trends and planning responses. It is important at this point to acknowledge the different types of informal food retail in South Africa. Spazas (small, fixed-location general stores, located mainly in residential areas) are impacted upon by supermarket expansion in different ways than street traders selling fresh produce or (raw or cooked) meat and livestock vendors. It is estimated there are currently around 100 000 spazas in South Africa (Basardien et al. 2014, 57). The South African Spaza and Tuckshop Association





**Figure 9.5** Primary product type of informal food traders in low-income areas of Philippi and Khayelitsha, Cape Town, 2013. (Source: Battersby et al. (2016))

argues that this number is far lower than before the supermarkets entered low-income areas. They estimate that Soweto lost 30 per cent of its spazas between 2005 and 2014 (Dolan 2014). Spazas cannot compete on price per unit with supermarkets, and urban residents who can afford to purchase in bulk from supermarkets do so. Spazas are very marginal businesses, and so any loss of income places them under great pressure. The loss of spazas exacerbates the food insecurity of the urban poor who cannot use supermarkets as their main source of food (Battersby 2011).

The relationship between street traders and supermarkets is a little different. Although well dispersed throughout low-income areas, street traders tend to cluster specifically around transport interchanges to serve commuting customers and outside the new shopping malls (see Figure 9.6, which shows street traders clustering outside a shopping mall and at a transport interchange). The clustering outside malls results from the recognition that the supermarkets do not necessarily provide access to more or cheaper fresh produce or meat in the forms that low-income consumers want. Although this may seem an organic relationship between supermarkets and informal traders, the traders generally have precarious rights to trade (Bamu and Theron 2012). Besides the implicit privileging of the formal over the informal in terms of regulation and planning, there is an additional structure that gives supermarkets a state-sanctioned advantage over informal traders. Since 2012, state social grants (child support grants, old age pensions, etc.), have been disbursed at supermarkets. This has provided a significant market advantage for supermarkets over smaller formal retailers and informal traders and has raised concerns





**Figure 9.6** Street traders clustering outside a mall in Kitwe, Zambia (top) and adjacent to a transport interchange, Bree St taxi rank in Johannesburg (bottom). (Source: Jane Battersby)

that the disbursement of grants through supermarkets merely channels government money to the big food companies, which will further increase their market share and hence less capital will circulate within the townships (Ledger 2013).

Although the experience of Cape Town and South Africa with regard to the relationship between food retail and food security has some unique aspects, such as the disbursement of social grants, there are important common characteristics and pointers towards future trajectories which match the pattern elsewhere in Africa. In 2008, the survey that was conducted by AFSUN in Cape Town was also conducted in 10 other cities in Southern Africa. In each city, by far the majority of households bought the vast majority of the food they consumed. And the majority of households bought food from supermarkets, but infrequently, day-to-day purchases being made in the informal sector. There were differences in the extent of these purchasing practices, for reasons that may be owed to supermarket penetration as well as fundamental urban design (Riley and Legwegoh 2014). What is clear is that, although South Africa is more advanced in terms of the expansion of supermarkets into the food retail environment, it is far from unique and similar processes of expansion and impact on informal food retail are occurring across the continent.

### **9.3. The role of urban policy and planning in urban food security**

An important thread that comes through the research on urban food security discussed above is the potential of government, and particularly local government, to influence the extent and nature of urban food insecurity. Although food insecurity is directly related to levels of poverty, a problem that needs to be addressed by national and international economic reforms, there are nonetheless a range of measures that can be taken by government to ameliorate its impacts. This section will first consider broad policy initiatives that can be undertaken by government and then focus on the potential role of urban planning.

Writing in North America, Pothukuchi and Kaufman drew attention to the relative absence of planners in issues of food within cities, noting,

Planners have been heavily involved in efforts to improve the quality of air and water through air and water pollution control programs. But the third leg of the life essential stool, food, has been

virtually ignored by planners. If planners are truly concerned about improving human settlements, they need to incorporate food issues into their working models. (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999, 220)

Since then there has been increased focus on integrating food planning into broader urban planning. Although food issues have been identified as critical urban challenges, it has also been noted that ‘municipalities have had limited jurisdiction over the food system, yet they are faced with the consequences of food system failure’ (MacRae and Donahue 2013, 3). As a result, cities around the world have developed a range of governance structures and strategies to embed food system interventions in local government. The problem of lack of a clear mandate is far from unique to South Africa.

In South Africa the explicit inclusion of food in urban planning has been extremely limited. This is largely attributable to the framing of food issues in South Africa and internationally. A belief that problems of food insecurity can be tackled by the increased production of food (agricultural stimulation) has been the dominant position internationally for many decades (Committee on World Food Security [CFS] 2006 cited in Crush and Frayne 2011b). In the new Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) continues to assume a link between food security and agriculture. Thus, despite the growing research and evidence that food security, and particularly urban food security, is far more complex and requires a multifaceted approach in which local governments should be centrally involved, the dominant solution continues to be sought in agricultural production.

The 2015 report of SACN argues that responses to the persistent food crisis have remained locked in a productionist/welfarist paradigm, following the lead of the twin-track approach to alleviating food insecurity supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and other global players (Crush and Frayne 2011a). The primary response is that agriculture and social safety nets (the social grant) should be employed to catch those unable to access food through the prevailing food system. This is evidenced in both the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) of 2002 and the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (NPFNS) (gazetted in 2014). As a result of this framing of food insecurity, and in the resultant strategic planning and programming, the position of national government dominates. The remaining spheres of government are not much more than implementers of nationally generated and uniformly (in terms of distribution) applied programmes and

projects, lacking contextual nuances and programming responses that engage local experiences.

In Cape Town, the only direct spatial planning connection to food is through agriculture. The 2012 Spatial Development Framework engages with food only through a policy statement about the need to ‘protect valuable agricultural areas, existing farmed areas and horticultural areas from urban encroachment, and support urban agriculture’, and identifies existing national and local legislation to support this policy statement (City of Cape Town 2012b, 65). The city’s current Integrated Development Plan (IDP) acknowledges food in two particular contexts. The first is in a discussion of the city’s role in municipal health (environmental health) through food control. The second is in a discussion of the benefits of rainwater harvesting for food gardens as a water conservation initiative. Previous IDPs have engaged food only through the lens of urban agriculture as a means to address food insecurity. This pattern is also reflected in the planning and policy documents of other cities in South Africa (SACN 2015). In contrast, a Food System Report conducted for the City of Cape Town in 2014 (Battersby et al. 2014) suggested ways in which the municipality could influence the food system and address food insecurity. This can be achieved through careful engagement with private sector stakeholders and civil society to nudge changes in areas of the food system beyond the city’s control. The report recommended five interventions that would help embed food within planning and wider municipal processes: develop a food charter to play a role in raising the public profile of the city’s food governance plan and developing consensus around objectives; develop political will through garnering support from high-ranking officials; develop a small core group of people within and beyond the city to work together to develop food system and food security interventions; develop an understanding of the priorities of departments and of how food can fit into their existing agendas; develop an overarching strategy, but start with small doable projects that connect at least two departments (Battersby et al. 2014)

Although there is currently little explicit engagement with the food system beyond land for production in existing planning legislation in South Africa, it is clear that planning profoundly shapes the food system. Pothukuchi (2000 cited in Roberts 2001) has argued that inaction in the food-planning environment does not have neutral consequences, but rather reflects negative outcomes. This is particularly the case because of ways in which informal food retail is dealt with in policy and planning.

AFSUN’s and other work on African cities shows that, in the face of strong supermarket penetration of cities along with the consistently low

contribution of urban agriculture to food sources, the availability of food through informal traders is a critical necessity. As argued above, informal traders, whether working from pavement locations or collectively in markets, can reduce the 'food desert' problem created by centralising supermarketisation and can continue to offer food sources to low-income households in forms that are accessible, affordable, flexible and suitably packaged. Moreover, the informal food economy is more likely to provide jobs and income that lower-income households (and especially women) can take advantage of; and is more likely to tap into local food production sources. Yet it is these informal traders which in many cities are most directly under attack from government regulation as attempts are made to disperse them from central retail areas, often as part of programmes to 'clean up' cities, to promote the spurious idea of 'world class' cities or to achieve the planning ideal of 'orderly' and controlled cities.

Linked to this is an ongoing attempt to formalise, modernise and relocate informal traders in African cities (for example, Chisokone market in Kitwe, Zambia and the proposed Hawkers' Mall in Kisumu, Kenya). This planning logic usually undermines the viability of these markets, since the new locations are often far removed from the usual consumers. The urban planning function of local government is most often implicated in these measures, although other departments (health, transport) may be involved as well.

This lack of sensitivity to the food security role of informal trade can be attributed both to the departmental siloing of food security in city municipalities with supporting food production, and also to the ways in which informal trade has been constructed in global, national and local policy. At a global level, informal trade is viewed primarily in terms of livelihoods and entrepreneurialism. This discourse filters down to national governments. So, in South Africa, the National Development Plan focuses on providing an enabling environment for small enterprises and addressing entrepreneurship skills gaps (Fourie 2015 cited in Skinner and Haysom 2016). This focus is reflected in the 2014 National Informal Business Upliftment Strategy (NIBUS), which rearticulates the need to encourage entrepreneurial activities and to graduate informal businesses into the formal economy (Skinner and Haysom 2016). It largely neglects the role of the informal sector in providing goods and services to the poor, seeking rather to formalise the informal. NIBUS does not make any reference to food, and, although the National Development Plan pays considerable attention to food security, the role of the informal sector is not acknowledged (Skinner and Haysom 2016). Somewhat unexpectedly, the Western Cape Informal Sector Framework notes that

informal traders play a role in providing superior-quality products at lower prices than their giant retail counterparts (Provincial Government of the Western Cape 2014, 12). The general omission of food is glaring given the prevalence of food retail in the informal sector. For example, a survey of informal street traders operating in metropolitan Durban in 2003 found that 60 per cent were selling food (KMT Cultural Enterprises 2003 cited in Skinner 2008, 230).

The national policy framing of informal trade has filtered down to the local government level. The City of Cape Town has an Informal Trading Policy and an Informal Policy By-Law (City of Cape Town 2013a; 2013b). The 2013 policy states that 'The City acknowledges the legitimacy and role of the informal economy, in terms of its employment and economic growth prospects' and identifies a role for spatial planning in 'locating suitable trading areas that support the viability and sustainability of informal trade'. There is no mention of food in the policy except in food safety regulation. Although the policy uses the language of creating an enabling environment, the City of Cape Town's new Amended Informal Trading By-Law (2013) has been widely critiqued by traders and researchers who argue that the bylaw is a 'controlling policy that stifled rather than promoted economic growth' (Hweshe 2013) and focuses on regulation rather than empowerment, as promoted in the Economic Growth Strategy.

The policy and bylaw need to be viewed within the broader planning regulations in Cape Town. In 2012, a new single zoning scheme was introduced (City of Cape Town 2012a), which has been argued to be anti-poor and could render 70 per cent of spazas illegal. A coalition of concerned individuals has questioned the rationale behind the new bylaw. The Western Cape Informal Traders Coalition has stated,

The most harmful of these provisions is section 5.2.3 which require that there should be a separate structure for trading, and that no area used for trading should open into a bedroom or toilet. These provisions clearly target the most vulnerable of subsistence traders who reside in one roomed RDP houses and one roomed shacks in informal settlements and are therefore automatically disqualified from trading.

The restrictive trading hours will have a dramatic impact on consumers who rely on Spaza Shops for their daily essentials with residents having to commute to formal shopping malls at night and on Sundays to purchase a loaf of bread ... The question may be asked whether these By-Laws were designed to benefit



the Corporate Retailers who are increasingly encroaching on the townships with the proliferation of shopping malls. Are these unrealistic and unjustifiable requirements placed on spaza shops a disguised attempt to eliminate competition for Big Business especially Corporate Retailers, who are the stated preferred constituency of the political party ruling the City at the moment? (Western Cape Informal Traders Coalition et al. 2013).

This suggests that despite the rhetoric of supporting informal traders, the larger planning frameworks seek to 'modernise' and 'standardise' the city in a way that undermines the traders' viability, particularly that of the small, marginal food retailers who are most responsive to the food needs of the poor.

The restrictive role of urban planning is evident in other countries as well. In Malawi the government upheld the belief that street vendors were 'out of place' in the city and that the role of government was to promote 'order' in the city. When food vendors were subject to large-scale eviction measures, as happened in Blantyre (Malawi) in 2006, then the 'geography of urban poverty [wa]s reshaped' and households no longer able to access these cheaper outlets suffered worsened food insecurity (Riley 2014). Such instances of eviction of urban informal workers are common in African cities and can be an expression of political bias against the growth of urban areas and in favour of rural areas.

Yet there is a growing recognition in the language of international policy that the informal economy has an important role to play in providing jobs and income, particularly in rapidly urbanising and under-resourced cities. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has shifted its discourse on informal workers from largely regarding them as 'tax evaders' in the early 2000s, to a present recommendation that sees them as vulnerable workers and economic units needing protection and policies that ensure decent work for all within a rights-based approach to formalisation. In their conferences of 2014 and 2015 the ILO acknowledged that informal workers should have regulated access to public space as a workplace as well as access to public natural resources. Mexico, Colombia and India all recognise the constitutional right of people to work and court decisions have affirmed the right to work on the street. In March 2014, the Indian Parliament ratified the Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending Act providing legal protection for street traders and affirming that street hawking is a fundamental right when carried out in designated spaces. The new Act also requires recognition

of 'natural markets' where street traders have congregated in response to local demand.

The role of government policy in supporting informal food retailers in Lusaka is an example of how the state can play a positive role. Even though there has been strong supermarket penetration in Lusaka, informal food markets and small outlets have maintained overall dominance in the urban food economy and still account for two-thirds of consumer food expenditure (Abrahams 2010). This, argues Abrahams (2010), shows that urban food markets do not inevitably have to transition towards supermarkets, but such a transition is likely to happen when government fails to support and invest in local and informal food networks. Lusaka has undergone significant public market construction projects, with three completed after independence in 1964 and a further large 'modern' market built in the 1990s able to house 'hundreds' of market stalls. Subsequent funding was used to locate a bus station near the trading area to support the market. In 2007 a Markets and Bus Station Act was instituted to address the management and representation of informal markets, transport networks and bus stations, and to allow consumers, vendors and other stakeholders to participate in decision-making around these facilities. More wholesale and cold-storage facilities were planned. These kinds of actions, Abrahams (2010) suggests, have not only strengthened informal and smaller food networks but have also encouraged them to formalise supply and chain management, thus allowing them to compete more effectively with formal supermarkets. The larger markets are centralised in the city and networks of smaller markets in the residential areas bring food outlets closer to residents. Urban food consumers benefit from these interventions because they have choices beyond that of the supermarket. The public markets are usually more accessible, provide cheaper food, source their products locally and often transport goods more quickly than the large supermarket chains (Abrahams 2010).

There has been increased interest in urban food system governance in many parts of the world, with calls for the integration of food into wider planning processes through the development of urban food strategies that move beyond disconnected sectoral responses (Hatfield 2012). Of particular interest is the call for food-sensitive planning and urban design (FSPUD) as described by Donovan and colleagues (2011). The FSPUD approach considers the physical and spatial implications of meeting food needs and actively seeks opportunities to connect meeting food needs to meeting other desired planning outcomes. Advocates of FSPUD argue that



FSPUD means thinking about ‘and’ opportunities rather than ‘or’. By planning and designing food-sensitive places, we have the opportunity to create jobs, build communities and transform, for the better, the environmental sustainability of our settlements and the environmental welfare enjoyed by their inhabitants. Planners and designers can use food to simultaneously address multiple objectives, creating diverse opportunities for people to meet their needs. (Donovan et al 2011, 13)

Through developing strategic rather than responsive food security policies, embedded in an understanding of the food system’s role in food security and other urban functions, spatial planning can play a wider role in ensuring food security. This includes using urban planning tools to generate food retail spaces that enhance food security.

## 9.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, given the overwhelming scale of urban food insecurity and its implications in African cities and elsewhere, and the clear failure of policies that rely on increasing rural agricultural production and urban agriculture, alternative approaches to addressing this issue are urgently required.

Supermarkets will continue to increase their presence and influence over food economies in cities and it is important that local governments consider their potential impacts on food security, positive and negative. Research continues to show the important role played by small and informal food outlets in cities, where they are able to provide food far closer to poorer urban residents, and often at competitive prices. Yet many city governments continue to evict, harass and constrain informal workers, sometimes because they are seen as competing with formal and more powerful economic interests and sometimes because of misguided visions of what an orderly and ‘world class’ city should look like. Section 9.3 of this chapter drew attention to certain shifts in attitude towards urban informal workers on the part of powerful bodies such as the ILO and also on the part of some governments that are moving to recognise and accommodate this sector of the economy. Some of these initiatives, as well as some cases where government has supported the informal urban food economy, have shown the important role that can be played by local urban policy and planning. We are not suggesting that policy and planning to support the informal food economy can solve problems

of urban food insecurity (this will demand much larger-scale socioeconomic and political reform) but we do argue that it can make an important difference.

Such planning interventions need to be framed within an overall initiative to address food system governance at the local government level. This is because the issue of food security demands integration across a range of local government departments and also demands collaborative engagement with other stakeholders: civil society, NGOs, the private sector, academia, etc. Such a policy framework and food security strategy needs to consider urban food production and distribution sectors and chains as an integrated whole, applying interventions that consider regulatory factors, pricing and food quality monitoring, capital investments (e.g. in markets, storage, transport) and the spatial distribution of the food system relative to the distribution of urban populations of different income levels.

## Note

1. With the exception of fresh produce and some meat.

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